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Religious freedom and the political order: the Ethiopian ‘secular state’ and the containment of Muslim identity politics

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The 2011–2014 controversies between the Ethiopian Government and Muslim communities on the role of Islam in Ethiopia have highlighted the precarious nature of religious relations in Ethiopia. Statements by public figures and religious leaders recently have drawn attention to the nature and scope of the Ethiopian secular state order. This paper describes the recent Muslim protest movement and the response to it by the government in the light of the secular state model. While the challenges to it also extend to the large Christian community in Ethiopia, the problems became prominent mainly in the case of the Muslims, who contest perceived ‘government interference’ in their community life and self-organization. I present an overview of key recent events and of factors inducing conflict between state and religion. The discussion makes reference to more general debates on the ‘secular model’ in Ethiopia and to the familiar though somewhat worn-out paradigm of ‘identity politics’. State repression of Muslim civic protest in Ethiopia revealed insecurities of the state: rather than an instance of the process of ‘othering’ a religious community, we see a case of political crisis, and a search for new modes of governance of diversity and communal religiosity in Ethiopia. As a result of the contestations, however, the secular order of the country will not be threatened, but modified.

Keywords: politics and religion; Ethiopia; Muslims; secularism; identity politics; public sphere

This study gives an account of the recent Muslim versus state conflict in Ethiopia in the light of the global discussions on the nature and prospects of the ‘secular state’, a political model of modern statecraft that aims to maintain neutral, procedural space in a landscape of worldview diversity. The model implies that religious rights/freedoms in the shared public sphere are *not absolute*, because the different faiths must be ‘spared the religious practices of others’. In addition, the model’s aim is, via overarching state law, to prevent internal religious tyranny.

While Ethiopia’s people overwhelmingly adhere to religious belief and often define their personal identity in terms of it, the state is secular: no state religion, no policies based on or defended by an appeal to religious arguments. The past three years of confrontation between the state and the larger part of the Muslim community have raised questions about the nature and scope of the secular state model and about relations

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between the major religious communities. Interestingly, Muslims mounted their protest against the state because of its perceived interference in religious affairs of their community, i.e. with an *appeal* to the secular statute.

The vestiges of past Ethiopian state identity were, however, religious, as Orthodox Christianity since the fourth century was the state religion until the demise of the empire in 1974. It largely provided the political ideology to the empire, but Islam since the 630s emerged in the country and gradually came to be an alternative, 'counter-hegemonic' way of life and worldview, and often with political claims of its own. The controversy between Muslims and the state in Ethiopia that emerged in mid-2011 is in itself nothing new and reflects a pattern of competition and political claim-making well-known in Ethiopian history.

The secular state idea in modern form stems from the Enlightenment, and is, in contrast to popular misconceptions, not against religion per se, but contra its imposition in public space and its claims to supernaturally justified authority above independent reason.¹ The Ethiopian case holds general interest and could be compared with other African countries² facing challenges with secularism as a constitutional formula. Critiques on the secular state model abound, but the alternative, a return to some form of religion-based polity, is seen by many as 'too ghastly to contemplate'. The problems feature in global debates on the foundational ideas of the socio-political order, and in attempts to meet challenges of 'resacralisation' of politics and state. In this paper, I limit myself to a brief evaluation of the theory and practice of Ethiopia's secular state model as confronted with the most recent phase of Muslim 'identity politics'. Muslim contestation in response to state efforts at regulation and control has made religious identity a kind of agonizing force in Ethiopian political life, evident in repression, interference, community pressure, radical polemics and physical clashes.

Religious identities in Ethiopia: historical context and societal dynamics

Ethiopia is a religiously diverse country. Islam entered the largely Christian country in the seventh century but its real expansion started after the tenth century. Defining episodes were the wars between the eastern Muslim sultanates and the Ethiopian state in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the *jihad* of Ahmed ibn Ibrahim in the early sixteenth century, and the problems under Emperors Tewodros and Yohannes (1860s–1870s). Muslim communities emerged in close conjunction with the Christian and traditional-religious communities, despite Islam not providing a legitimizing ideology to the imperial state – historically, the prerogative of the Orthodox Church. Notably, Islam and Christianity articulated themselves vis-à-vis each other in an ambivalent relationship of competition and cooperation, and provided partly shared 'models of power'. Their differential relationship – and specifically of their *elites* – led to perennial rivalry in the political sphere, starting with the conflicts between the Christian monarchs with Muslim (military) leaders in the fourteenth century, but was embedded in an interdependent web of historical discourse and practices of power. Historically, the Muslims' position was hardly one of socio-political equality (neither was that of other minority religions nor ethnic groups). But everyday structures of coexistence and toleration – i.e. not tolerance per se – developed over time, and relations had been quite accommodating and pragmatic, though in practice this often meant benign neglect and avoidance of underlying tensions.³ Such studied mutual avoidance was not by definition negative, however.

In the post-revolution *Derg* period (1974–1991), Muslim rights were recognized in a new secular order, and a recasting of Ethiopian post-imperial state identity began.

Tensions between religion and state came to fruition in the post-1991 the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) period. In the wake of religious freedoms legally granted, a new wave of polemics emerged as well, not only about religious difference but also about the state, Muslim–Christian relations and national history or identity.⁴ These polemics led to revisionist history writing, often of a dubious, very partisan quality.

It is not surprising to see such issues coming back in the 2011–2014 political crisis between Muslims and the government. Indeed, the polemics seem to have been revived, although less so in the public sphere and the (censored) press, than in declarations, petitions, demonstrations and a flood of website articles and comments written by Ethiopian Muslims and Christians in Internet forums and the blogosphere.⁵ In these products, there is constant reference to past grievances and contested historical 'facts'.

Contested historical backgrounds of religious belief and today's politics

The misconception that Islam was a *Fremdkörper* in Ethiopia led not only to misnomers of there being no 'Ethiopian Muslims' (only 'Muslim in Ethiopia'), but also to the often-described discriminatory pattern in civic, political and economic life. However, this idea of the Muslims as being 'external' and marginal also had a simple territorial-political reason; most Muslims in the Horn until about the early nineteenth century *were simply not part of the Ethiopian highland state*, but lived in (semi-) independent Muslim states in the east that were not Ethiopia and at most tributary to it. Muslims, although always a large part of the population (today 35%), did not attain prominence in defining the state's policies or participating in governance.

The imperial model changed under the military and republican nationstates of post-1974 Ethiopia, where the ideologies of governance were vested in different narratives of legitimacy: 'revolutionary dictatorship of the working classes' under the *Derg* (1974–1991), and ethnic federalism and 'revolutionary democracy' of the EPRDF (since 1991). The 1974 revolution had marked the decline of Christianity's role as state religion: the Ethiopian Orthodox 'Tewahido' Church (EOTC) was dispossessed both as a large landowner and as the source of normative political imagery of the nation and has not had a political role since. In fact, the EOTC was effectively 'domesticated' by the present EPRDF regime: an effort it intended to repeat with the Muslims.

The challenges to the secular state model in Ethiopia today are indeed most evident in the rapidly evolving relationship of the regime with the Muslim community. While the status of Muslims made great strides under EPRDF, the memory of second-class position is strong and is cultivated. It leads Muslim spokesmen to frequently go into un-self-critical 'victimhood mode' in their responses to state action. They capitalize on Islam's historical marginality to pose additional demands voiced as 'civil rights' but in large part being religious rights. This pattern has reasons: (1) constitutional ambiguities of Muslim religious law and self-organization, (2) governmental control reflexes and (3) a lack of additional law-giving by the state on the specifics of the secular order. But part of the problem seems internal to the Muslim community: while they largely cherished the secular state model because it broke the link between state and EOTC, there is neither thorough debate nor unanimity on what the boundaries of religious expression and religious claims by Muslims in the public domain can or should be. This ambiguity, coupled with the often maximalist claims in the Muslim community, constantly produces arguments and incidents, with the government talking about 'extremism' and the Muslim community about 'repression' and 'interference in religious affairs'.

Ethiopia: legal context of relations between state and religion

Building on the 1987 *Derg* constitution that had instituted *de jure* religious freedom and a secular state, the 1994 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) continued the line, although with a different philosophy: decentralizing religion, as it did with ethnicity, and allowing the faith communities to internally organize themselves. In article 11, the 'secular state' was defined: 'a separation of religion and state', 'no state religion' and for our purposes, the core issue: 'The state shall not interfere in religious matters and religion shall not interfere in state affairs'. In addition, article 27(1) reads:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include the freedom to hold or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and the freedom, either individually or in community with others, and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

In article 27(3) it says that 'none shall be subject to coercion or other means which would restrict or prevent his freedom to hold a belief of his choice'. In article 27(5) one reads:

Freedom to express or manifest one's religion or belief may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, peace, health, education, public morality or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others, and to ensure the independence of state and religion

Clearly meant here was a *reciprocal* relation between the freedoms to be respected by both state and religious communities, and in this article, the constitution does not differ from most secular constitutions elsewhere.

In articles 34(5) and 78(5), customary and religious courts are recognized, i.e. including the already existing *shari'a* courts.⁶ While this was a commendable grant of religious freedom and autonomy to Muslims, Corazza noted that here a difference was created in the treatment of Islam compared to other faiths,⁷ which do *not* have such courts and no comparable institutional substructure. This court structure has also led to strong community control on the *members* of the Muslim community, especially in the domain of family law, that tends to disadvantage the weakest, i.e. women and children, and in effect reinforces conformism and male pressure.⁸ As usual, the clause 'Particulars shall be determined by law' – a very frequent expression in the Constitution, also seen in article 34 (5) – has hardly been given a follow-up.

As in Europe, the exact meaning of the constitutional clauses on the separation of state and religion is thus problematic, because in particular the Muslim communities forward demands from their personal life sphere and presumed religious duties *towards* the public sphere, e.g. when in government service. But that the meaning of the 'secular state' is said to be fuzzy is not so much because of the content and programmatic nature of the secular clauses themselves, it is primarily because in their observance and in the face of demands from believers attempting to impose views on a constituency larger than their own (initially even *within their own* presumed religious community) that the ideal of 'secularism' comes to be questioned. Incomprehension among believers of the meaning of 'secularism' aside, the very fact of large groups adhering to a certain religion is held to mean (by them, and notably their religious leaders) that their 'primary' identity as religious believers should be respected always and everywhere in all its forms. For the state this is of course questionable and an ever-present challenge to meet. One challenge to a constitutionally secular state is that when a majority of the population is strongly

religious they often want to see this worldview somehow being reflected in the political order, which they often see as a *moral*, transcendently based order. The intrinsic contradiction is not easily solved.

Emerging tensions in conditions of religious freedom

Since 1991 the secular state under the EPRDF reinforced the legal status and public role of Protestant-Evangelical faiths and of Islam, which could develop self-organizations, receive foreign funding for educational and building activities and expand their media presence in a flood of religious magazines, books and web products. Public self-presentation and religious propagation thus greatly expanded. Among Muslims, the *Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council* (EIASC, often referred to as the *Majlis*) was officially registered in 1995 and came to be their government-supported representative organ. Other new organizations were the *Islamic da'wa and Knowledge Association* (registered 1991), a strict revivalist organization mainly active in Arsi, the *Ethiopian Ulama Association* (in 1991) or the *Al-Wahda Islamic Propagation Association* (2004). Also local branches of foreign organizations like the *World Muslim League* (Saudi Arabian) or the *Tabligh* were founded. The former supported local institutions like the *Aweliya School and Mission Centre* in Addis Ababa since 1966, which came to be a centre of 'reformist' Islam,⁹ inspired by Sunni *muwahhidūn* ('Wahhabist') doctrine.

The (re)connection of Evangelicals–Pentecostals and Muslims with foreign partners and normative centres outside Ethiopia contributed to revivalism, generating new claims and fuelling activism. The well-financed foreign groups indeed tried to influence local Muslim thought and practice.¹⁰ This was perceived as a problem in government and in foreign circles,¹¹ especially when militant activism or violent incidents emerged. A new discourse on the 'fanaticism' of believers (notably of Evangelicals and Muslims) thus emerged at the same time, corresponding with public lamentations about the 'decline of accommodative religious relations'. This discourse could thrive in the shadows of ill-defined laws omitting to fill in the content and the applicability of the secular statute of the constitution.

The heightened visibility and normativity of 'reformist' Islam changed religious practices of Muslims and social relations. One of the paradoxes of the religious freedom regime since 1991 is the notably increased number of violent incidents not only between Christians and Muslims, but also *within* these communities. Hundreds of victims killed in religious violence can be counted since 1991. Suffice it to mention a few major cases.

Intra-Muslim violence

Intra-Muslim violence likely started with the Anwar Mosque incident in Addis Ababa on 21 February 1995, where due to a row within the EIASC nine people were killed and dozens wounded. The government then furthered the appointment of a loyalist EIASC and took the opportunity to crack down on what it saw as extremist groups among the Muslims.¹² Some Islamic schools and organizations were closed down. Reformist Salafist groups were targeted, although not all of these advocated a form of political Islam that the government feared and saw as unconstitutional. There were repeated signs of growing tensions between 'Sufi' Muslims and 'reformists' and/or Salafists, resulting in mosque burnings and personal attacks. In the Gondar area and some other places, several extremist *Takfir wal-Hijra* groups were active. One such group was arrested in 2009. Agitation against customs like shrine veneration, *zikr* chanting, Sufimystic orders, the

intercession of Muslim ‘holy men’, and the celebration of *Mawlid* became a standard activity of ‘reformist’, urban-based Muslims against mainstream Sufist Islam, denying the legitimacy of its spirituality. Sufist Muslims of course resent this.

Christian–Muslim tensions

Tensions between Muslims and Christians were shown in numerous incidents. Among recent ones: in the largely Muslim town of Besheno (near Alaba) in January 2011, Evangelical Christians were harassed after Muslims posted notices on the doors of Christian homes saying they ‘should convert, leave the city or face death’. In March 2011, Muslims in the Goda district of Jimma were said to have burned down 10 Christian homes, leaving 80 Christians homeless. Usually the violence was between Muslims and Protestant–Evangelical Christians; less so between Muslims and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) adherents. In November 2011 a group of Muslim students burned down St. Arsema Orthodox church in Qoto Baloso (Silt’e zone).¹³

Another 2011 episode was the attacks by Muslims on Protestant churches in the Asendabo area, when the news was spread that ‘a Koran had been defiled’. While the truth of this incident could not be ascertained,¹⁴ the rumour alone was enough to produce clashes (one dead, six injured), displacement (4000 people) and the destruction of 51 churches. This overreaction marks the emerging everyday distrust between religious groups, in an atmosphere of heightened polemical exercise of religion in Ethiopia, while incidents may be instigated by a few militants, they achieve a rapid mass following. This is different from the past, when religious mob violence was rare.

It does not mean that the Christian–Muslim opposition is entirely politicized and that Muslims are on course towards a fully ‘political Islam’, because many of the conflicts had a specific *local* dynamics, e.g. trans-sected by ethnic antagonisms. Also, in some key majority Muslim areas, like Wollo and Harar, such violent clashes are still rare. Moreover, several vocal opponents of the Salafists have emerged to formulate a counter-message to Salafism, and all the more to violent Muslim tactics. Nevertheless, from the discourse of leaders in both communities it is clear that the interreligious fabric is under strain, indicating differing visions and narratives on Ethiopian community, state and society. A significant element in the 2011 Asendabo conflict was the demand voiced by several Muslim preachers that Islamic schools and universities should be independent and free from any ‘non-Muslim interference’. Some also called for the eviction of all non-Muslims from the area.¹⁵

Changes within Ethiopian Muslim society

These developments no doubt have to do not only with the changing balance between the three main faiths, but also with changes within Ethiopia’s Muslim society, which although pluralist and divided across ethnic traditions has an emerging new leadership stratum and is economically stronger. There is generational competition, whereby the younger, more ‘reformist’, religiously educated generation is taking over. *Da’wa* campaigns are ongoing, whereby many customary expressions of beliefs and practices are predictably condemned as ‘deviation’, ‘idolatry’, etc. One could already see this new strain in the 1994 Muslim youth demonstration in Addis Ababa, where participants demanded that *shari’a* be included in the new Constitution. Telling was a public demand voiced in 2009 by Muslim students at Addis Ababa University for the right to wear *hijabs* and to have prayers on campus and lecture hours adjusted to prayer times. This was not granted. The policy was

also upheld elsewhere. On 23 January 2013, for example, Bahir Dar University prohibited the wearing of the *niqab* and *hijab* on campus.¹⁶

The three Muslim movements distinguished by several observers¹⁷ are the *Salafists*—inspired by the purist, *muwahhidūn* (‘Wahhabist’) version of Islam – the *Tabligh*, a large, grass-roots movement of Islamic propagation and expansion and the more diffuse so-called Intellectualist movement among educated, urban-based people, which has affinity with *Al Islah* (as in Somalia) and Muslim Brotherhood (MB) ideas. There are no visible branches of the conservative-Islamist ‘MB’ (founded in Egypt in 1928), but certain groups propagate their outlook.¹⁸ These three movements more and more set the terms of debate within the Ethiopian Muslim community and confront the mainstream Sufi versions, pushing them onto the defensive. This process has often been incorrectly dubbed as ‘radicalization’ (leading to ‘fanaticism’, Amharic: *akrarinnet*) by the Ethiopian Government, as it sets out a narrative seen as divisive.

Countering ‘radicalization’

It is against this background, alarmed by persistent religious violent incidents in the country, that the government in mid-2011 designed a programme to ‘train’ Muslim community leaders in the principles of state-religion separation, religious tolerance and moderation in public religious expression. This was to give substance to the secularism clauses in the Constitution and to tackle what they saw as emerging extremist discourse and practice. The concerns over ‘radicalization’ among Muslims increased because of the growing violent incidents, the new connections of Ethiopian Muslims with sources of support and funds from abroad and the events in the Ogaden region (the armed rebellion of the Ogaden National Liberation Front, ONLF). Finally, there was the Somalia conundrum: the *Islamic Courts Union* that had taken control of Mogadishu and large parts of southern Somalia had called in 2006 for *jihad* against Ethiopia¹⁹; in 2011, the Somali Islamist insurgent movement *Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahidin* called for Muslim Ethiopians ‘to rise against their government’.²⁰ The Ethiopian Government took such threats quite seriously.

Test case: the trajectory of conflict between Muslims and the state, 2011–2014

Since 1991 the predominant Muslim mood had been high acceptance of the new government and its liberal religious policy. There were occasional demonstrations under EPRDF rule, but the secular state formula worked to the advantage of Muslims. They realized basic parity with Christians: chief religious holidays were officially recognized, Friday prayer hours extended at the cost of working time for all workers (including non-Muslims) and the parallel *shari’a* court system was confirmed. Economically and politically, Muslims became much more prominent and were represented in all the levels of ruling party and government. As Ramos has emphasized, the new assertiveness of Muslims reflects major socio-economic changes in the stature of the community.²¹ EPRDF policy thus created civic space and accorded rights, but this also was a part of a balancing act of the party to neutralize social, ethnic *and* religious groups as vehicles for public action and criticism against the regime. It was not so much to create a ‘governmental religion’ per se, but indicated that government policy again went *beyond* maintaining the secular order into claiming the overall political control.

But Muslim-state relations gradually moved from uneasy accommodation to confrontation. In 2011 in particular then Prime Minister Meles Zenawi thought that

Muslim radicalization and activism might grow out of hand and needed a state response. Specific reasons cited were the violent incidents in the Jimma area in 2011 as well as the mounting public and cyberspace polemics between Muslim,²² Orthodox and Protestant preachers and 'intellectuals', denigrating and attacking each others' faith.

The government plan in mid-2011 was to 'reform' the outlook of the Muslim community leaders and bring their views in line with the 'rights and duties' of religious groups as defined in the Constitution: a renewed phase to secure state control over public discursive space, following its nearhegemony in the political sphere.

The result was the 'Ahabashism' campaign (as opponents labelled it), started in the summer of 2011. Teachers from the Lebanese *Al Ahabash* organization (officially, the 'Association of Islamic Charitable Projects', founded in 1930 in Lebanon and led by Ethiopian-born *Sheikh* Abdullah al Harari, 1910–2008), were invited to head an outreachtraining programme to counter perceived radicalization tendencies among Muslims. This was done with the EIASC, formally the instigator and implementer. Whatever its intrinsic nature, *Al Ahabash* was perceived as a moderate, non-radical Muslim group without a formula of political Islam, and thus superficially seen as suitable to 'teach' the government's preferred form of Islam. Affiliated religious instructors were mobilized for this campaign, to be rolled out in the country via religious schools and mosques. Some 16,000–18,000 Muslim community leaders underwent training. While the diagnosis – an existing danger of radicalization and extremism – might have been partly right (see above), the medicine was questionable. Privileging one Muslim movement, and a small and largely foreign one at that, above others was done without prior consultation with Muslim representatives in Ethiopia, except the EIASC. Many Muslims saw this as patronizing and 'political'. The irony was that the *Al Ahabash*²³ – rooted in the Sufist tradition and with adherents in Ethiopia, e.g. in Harar – reflected a model of accommodative interaction with other Muslim groups and non-Muslim that was close to actual practice in Ethiopia. *Al Ahabash* theology is marked by moderation (*i'tidal*) and ideas of coexistence with other faiths. So the *Al Ahabash* formula sounded attractive. But it is declared to be outside the *Sunna* mainstream by opponents and Islamists, who denigrate it when advocating their own versions of the faith.

The campaign²⁴ did not work in all mosques. Notably in the larger towns and in Addis Ababa it backfired, seen as clear interference in the internal affairs of the Muslim community, and therefore as 'unconstitutional'. The government followed up with other measures, for example in September 2011 withdrawing the licence of the International Islamic Relief Organisation, the Saudi non-governmental organization (NGO) funding the Aweliya School & Mission Centre in Addis Ababa, on the suspicion that they were engaged in 'religious propaganda' and not 'relief', to which a humanitarian NGO under Ethiopian law should be confined. In December 2011 the EIASC dismissed Arabic language teachers and several administrators at the Aweliya School. This triggered the first mass protest on 4 January 2012.

Muslim protests

Under the vocal leadership of Addis Ababa Muslim spokesmen, sheikhs, teachers and writers, the government's 'constitutional' and 'anti-extremism' education was thus rejected as an infringement on religious freedom and a violation of the constitution, article 11. A large urban constituency was mobilized and mass demonstrations began, with the Aweliya School as the epicentre. They lasted for more than two years, still ongoing as of early 2014. *Ahabash*-affiliated teachers were resented, and harsh doctrinal

attacks on the group began in the protest speeches, in the Muslim press and on the Internet.²⁵ The public demonstrations were peaceful, however, and voiced three demands to the government:

- *Not* to surreptitiously appoint its own personnel to the Islamic Councils, but let Muslims freely choose
- *Not* to orchestrate the ‘infiltration of unfamiliar Islamic teachings’ [i.e. *Al Ahbash* ideas] to their communities
- *not* to interfere in the running their Islamic schools, notably Aweliya College.

These are of course political demands, though referring to constitutional article 11 on secularism. They were not met by the government. On 17 April 2012, Prime Minister Meles gave a speech in parliament and stated the government would pursue ‘extremists’ violating the Constitution. He referred to both minority ‘Christian extremists’, such as those seen waving a banner saying ‘one country, one religion’, and ‘extremist Salafists’ or ‘Al Qaeda cells’ arrested in Arsi and Bale. He also rejected calls from Muslims to ban the *Al Ahbash* from Ethiopia. He said that ‘the responsibility to teach the constitutional provisions of diversity of religion and ensure law and order rested on the Government’s shoulders’, thus claiming a continued role for the government to influence the religious communities on rights and duties.²⁶

In subsequent months Muslim demonstrations continued, under the label *Dimsatchin yisema* (Amharic: ‘Let our voice be heard’). On 20 April 2012 there was a mass protest at the big Addis Ababa mosques against the government, the role of the EIASC and Meles’s 17 April speech. An escalation occurred when on 27 April 2012 seven people were killed during a skirmish at a mosque in Assassa (Arsi district) after police acted to arrest a ‘radical’ sheikh who had allegedly given an ‘inflammatory’ speech.²⁷ These were the first casualties in the conflict.

Meanwhile peaceful demonstrations by Muslims in Addis Ababa continued, and resistance spread via social media, Internet sites and discussion groups, expanding in a network-like fashion. Aweliya School and Mission Centre became the centre of Muslim protests, with speeches, petitions and almost every Friday a mass demonstration. The government gave its views and warnings in a televised statement on 3 May 2012, reemphasizing the law and its secular clauses.²⁸

In response to government actions, a committee of 19 leading Muslims was formed at the Aweliya, to represent the community in negotiations with the government. The government predictably resented this move to bypass the EIASC, and on 13 July raided an Aweliya gathering, arresting more than 70 people including the members of the mosque’s central organizing committee. During subsequent protests, police and security services assaulted and arrested hundreds of Muslims at the Aweliya and Anwar Mosques.²⁹ Many were subsequently released, but at least 17 prominent members of the community arrested between 19 and 21 July 2012 remained in detention.

The Muslim press was also tackled; on 20 July police raided the offices of the privately owned Horizon Press in Addis Ababa, arrested its owner and confiscated copies of the weeklies *Salafiyah* and *Sawtul Islam*. The editor of the periodical *YeMuslimoch-Gudday* (Amharic: Muslim Affairs) was also arrested, and two of its journalists went into hiding.

Muslim protests – now supported by Christians and some opposition groups – also spread to the provinces. On 5 August three imams were arrested in Gelemesso in East Harerge, while on 10 August the police used teargas and beat up protesters outside the

Arab Genda Mosque in Dessie city. Muslim holidays were used for further demonstrations, e.g. on *Id al-Adha* on 26 October 2012 in Addis Ababa.

In October 2012, the EIASC and its branches held new elections, although they were rejected by the protest movement because of suspected government intervention and rigging, and some violent incidents occurred.³⁰ The results of 5 November declared as new chairman *sheikh* Kiyar Mohamed Aman, from Oromia, and a former secretary at the Ethiopian Embassy in Riyadh. The deputy was Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the core of the EPRDF-member Kedir Mahmoud Aman from Tigray, already a key figure in the EIASC in the past decade. The other members of the 11-person EIASC in Addis Ababa were also affiliated with the government as former employees, or were previously in the EIASC. This made them unacceptable in the eyes of the Muslim protest movement.

During 2013, protests continued but slowed down. On 8 August there was an *Eid-al-Fitr* demonstration, asking for 'respect of the constitution' and release of imprisoned leaders. The same month there was a violent clash in Kofele (Oromiya), whereby around 11 Muslim protesters were killed. The major issue that year was the trial of 29 Muslims arrested in 2012, including the 17 Aweliya Committee members. This only started in late 2013, but behind closed doors.³¹ The charges of 'conspiracy to establish an Islamic state' and 'to prepare violent attacks' were not very convincing, but the 'evidence' could not be assessed. In December 2013, 11 prisoners were released and the remaining 18 continued to stand trial. An unfair trial outcome might provoke a new round in the confrontation between the government and the Muslim community. On 23 December 2013 the incarcerated Muslim activists issued an interesting, moderately phrased statement calling for Muslim rights and again renouncing violence. It showed their ongoing effort to emphasize the Muslim protests as a movement to realize *civil* rights – not religious rights.

The cyclical production of religious identity conflicts

The Ethiopian state has the legal authority to 'inform and teach' citizens about civic duties and constitutional values on secularism. Its effort to 'combat extremism' and to consolidate 'moderation' in the Muslim community by a top-down campaign seems, however, to amount to *de facto* interference in religious affairs. The government underestimated or did not care about the broad scepticism among Muslims towards the EIASC, seen – rightly or wrongly – as a corrupt, predominantly loyalist regime crony. The 'Ahabashism campaign' undermined the regime's position even further.

Not only Muslims are in trouble under the current regime. As said above, the Orthodox Christians (43.5% of the population) has seen its status consistently eroded under EPRDF rule. The regime in this matter is a worthy successor of the *Derg* regime. The EPRDF since 1991 has continued with a policy of preventing any religious denomination or organization to become a mobilizational vessel for anti-party/anti-government protests. This policy was actively and forcefully pursued and is unlikely to be given up. But training campaigns in moderation were not visible among the EOTC believers and not at all among Protestants–Evangelicals.

In many cases of violent clashes between Christians and Muslims over the past two decades, the government did not intervene in a timely fashion to keep the peace.³² In addition, it regularly ignored or walked over Orthodox sensibilities, as in several ETV programmes stating that the Christian emperor hosting Arab-Muslim refugees in the time of Mohammed indeed converted to Islam ('Ahmed al-Najash'), or in the attempt to raise a statue for Ahmed 'Grag' in Gondar Region. In the 2012 row over the Waldubba monastery lands, the government claimed most lands belonging or adjacent to this old

Orthodox Christian monastery in the Gondar region for a state corporation to produce sugar cane.³³ Characteristically, this was done without consultation and with no sensitivity towards this tranquil spot of Orthodox spirituality. These government actions, in a mirror image of those taken against the Muslim community, did little to stimulate an inclusive national narrative where both religious traditions would find accommodation.

The growth and revivalism of Islam in post-1991 Ethiopia have created an image of its 'radicalization' among government, EOTC and Protestant adherents. In government circles there is a myth that such an overall radicalization of all Ethiopian Muslims is ongoing, even inevitable, and that it is a danger. This is based on seeing an increased number of clashes between religious communities and occasional activities of violent splinter groups.³⁴ The stricter and dogmatic forms of Islam and their anti-Sufi stand are here equated with 'fanaticism' and therefore as un-Ethiopian and violent. While this has little to do with the historical process of 'othering' that some observers talk about³⁵ the 'securitization' of Muslims is a recurring feature of state policy.

The January 2013 screening on Ethiopian state TV of the documentary *Jihadawi Harakat*³⁶ whipped up this threat perception. It presented muddled evidence and biased information about the dangers of radical Islamism in Ethiopia, and presented parts of 'confessions' of the arrested Muslim leaders. In the eyes of Ethiopian Muslims, the nature and timing of the documentary were an attempt to discredit the Muslim movement.³⁷

In the light of this myth of inevitable radicalization there is also an *opposite* one, asserting that all is well in the Ethiopian Muslim community and that it is impervious to jihadist and violent versions of religious politics.³⁸ This is a politically correct myth based on premature judgement and lack of sufficient field data on the developments within Ethiopian Islamic communities or on the many cyberspace religious polemics on websites run by Ethiopian Muslims and Christians. The latter is a well-developed genre with a high level of invectives, insults and militant calls. Ethiopia's Muslim population is not homogenous in either religious ideology or politics. That there are active programmes and Salafist networks propagating the cause of an exclusivist Islam, against Sufist versions and with broader *da'wa* aims towards Ethiopia as a whole, is beyond doubt,³⁹ although this does not by definition mean they are violent or jihadist.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, there are few analyses of the internal theological-political views on state and society among Ethiopian Muslims although in some circles the ideas of key 'reformists' like Ibn Taymiyya, Muhammed Abdel-Wahhab and Sayyid Qutb find allegiance. This strain of thinking would set the Muslim leadership on a sure crash course with not only the government but *also* the secular state ideal now propagated by the protest movement.⁴¹

The landscape of religious relations in Ethiopia is still in flux and highly malleable vis-à-vis politics and foreign influences. Due to globalization and mediatization of religions and Islam's growing orientation towards what is seen as the '*Ummah*', self-identities harden and become defensive. Images of the nation and the role of the state are being redefined. Islam's diversity in Ethiopia has always allowed mainstream or accommodative as well as radical elements.⁴² A clear line between Sufist, accommodative Islam and a purist, Salafist Islam allegedly from abroad cannot be drawn, although there are differences of emphasis and social practice. But the post-1991 reconnection of Ethiopian Muslims with educational and financial sources and ideas in the wider Muslim world is a fact. It has led to an ongoing religious prestige war between the more traditional mainstream and the revivalist Muslims.

State monitoring and repression of Muslims in Ethiopia were evident in the repeated interference in the EIASC elections, the closure of Muslim periodicals and youth associations, and the campaign to 'educate' Muslim community leaders in 'constitutional

right and duties' via *Al Ahbash*-linked preachers. In its wake, religious radicalization is visible in some circles of the community, typically among the 'reformist' younger generation in the cities. It is expressed in an ideological reorientation about what 'real Islam' is, and about how the presence and profile of Muslims in Ethiopia can be more forcefully asserted. This apparent move towards more globalized and sometimes radical-political versions of Islam is not systematic.⁴³ But if it persists it is likely to spell more trouble for the Muslim population itself (internal divisions), for the secular state model and for interreligious relations.

In sum, Islamic communities in Ethiopia continue to go through processes of economic and social change. First, the boundary between *ethnic* and religious identities is shifting, competing loyalties but not always mutually exclusive. New alliances are formed across boundaries. Second, apart from a large economically disadvantaged youth population there are the newly emerging strata: religiously trained teachers, *ulemas* and activists whose self-styled daily job is to 'reform' and teach Muslims their version of the faith, a growing urban-based class of wealthy Muslims and a growing number of Muslims represented in government. These groups are redefining the place of Muslims in Ethiopia. There is the reassertion of their political role, as expressed in the activism against the government seen since January 2012. Despite the strong *local* diversity of the Muslim experience, a creeping politicization of Islam in Ethiopia seems ongoing, enhanced by religious competition, the impact of 'revivalist' preachers propagating an exclusively *religious* identity for Muslims and the government's policy of imposing top-down policies in a non-negotiated manner.

Practising the secular state model in a developing African country

Since Durkheim's sociology of religion we know that religious identification is historically a prime factor of people's belonging and community formation. This is true in general but especially in conditions of livelihood problems, poverty, class inequality, local power competition and also in migration contexts marked by insecurity. State orders may be secular – as a political formula – but populations, notably in Africa, are religious.⁴⁴ Often when political freedoms outside the ruling party regime are non-existent, as in Ethiopia, Eritrea or Rwanda, religion emerges as an *alternative identity* to politics. In recent years, especially after the 2005 elections, religious identity in Ethiopia has indeed become the 'domain of last retreat', if not escapism, of citizens unable to express themselves freely in the civic or political sphere. But growing religious identification of Muslims and others inevitably *takes on a political role*: voicing claims about community power and self-organization and, in the background, about the country's legal order and national identity. This process may thus have consequences for the civic identification of Muslims; if their religious 'civil rights' are not recognized, their religious identity will become their *primary* identity. This identity can develop towards identification with the Muslim '*Ummah*', i.e. towards a non-territorial and deculturalized identity that leaves 'Ethiopian identity' secondary. This may be difficult to reconcile with political-civic identity, which constitutionally demands secular, not religious commitment in the civil-judicial sense. It may put the community on a durable conflict course with the state.

An issue in the Muslim protests as yet ambiguously and hesitantly expressed is indeed what country Ethiopia is, or should be, its 'national identity' is no longer 'Christian', not 'Muslim' and problematically 'secular'. In the speeches voiced by Muslim spokesmen and ad hoc leaders during the 2012 protests, the (legitimate) demand with reference to

article 11 was choosing their own institutions/leaders and following their own religious views. But in the course of the swelling protests in both the streets, in the (digital) media, and via polemics against the *Ahbash* and Sufism, new political–theological views were clearly articulated.⁴⁵ They challenged Ethiopian secular state clauses about the role of the *shari'a*, about expressing religious symbols in public/state places and institutions and about not delegitimizing other religious groups or sects. These challenges are made against the background of ideas among many Muslims in Ethiopia that they ‘already are the majority of the population’,⁴⁶ and that this has to be better reflected in the nation’s laws and institutions. To keep in mind is that in a recent Pew survey 65% of Ethiopian Muslims was in favour of ‘making *shari'a* the official law of the land’.⁴⁷ No doubt, among Muslims the discourse on Muslim identity and the state is shifting.

The global flow of religious resources notably intensified in the past two decades and has allowed people of all religions (except perhaps the EOC – a still largely national church) to reinforce their religious commitment and to speed up revivalism or proselytization. Evangelicals and Pentecostals have support from overseas, both from migrants and from branches of transnational missionizing groups, for their pastoral, church building and development work. The same is true for the Muslim communities, receiving support in massive, but less transparent, semi-private channels such as the *Muslim World League* of Saudi Arabia, wealthy individuals in the Gulf States or Saudi Arabia and diaspora communities.⁴⁸ This support is primarily directed to religious school and mosque construction, distribution of religious books and *da'wa* (propagation) activities, although diaspora groups also support social, economic and relief projects. The numbers of both the adherents of Islam and Evangelical Protestantism in Ethiopia have been on the rise, largely at the cost of the Orthodox and the remaining traditional believers. As we saw, this process is ‘polemical’ and competitive, and will not automatically follow a peaceful path. While the Ethiopian government has constitutionally granted religious freedom, it did not have – or use – appropriate ways to manage existing tensions emerging as a result of the new religious liberties granted. It only started quite late to actively handle such tensions, and often in a manner that fanned the flames of conflict. As in the political domain, the tactic of divide-and-rule was often used.

The so-called Ahbashization campaign of 2011–2012 was one prime example of this. It clearly illustrated the regime’s views on the nature of state versus religion relations in Ethiopia, and revealed the problematic aspects of the top-down political control used. Indeed, the application of this model to the country’s religious relations heightened instability and further undermined government legitimacy, and thereby the secular model itself.⁴⁹ It has illustrated what democracy theorists and political analysts repeatedly said: the policies of authoritarian control, interference and ‘corrective’ repression will produce what it allegedly wants to prevent: political protests, religious radicalization and more communal tensions in Ethiopia’s pluralist society. It has also hindered broader consultation with the Muslim community or with diaspora groups about the real extent of the dangers of radicalization and violent militancy. An opening for a constructive relationship between the government and the Ethiopian Muslim diaspora did occur in 2007, when a delegation from several diaspora countries visited Ethiopia.⁵⁰ They were well prepared to discuss issues of Muslim life and civic status in Ethiopia and met the Prime Minister. They also talked with Christian community representatives, and a structure of regular dialogue appeared to have been achieved. The delegation succeeded in mediating conflicts between more ‘Sufist’ and ‘Salafist’ factions in the Muslim community.⁵¹ For this purpose, the *Addis Ababa Ulema Unity Forum* (AAUUF) was

founded. But when its activities became a 'threat' to the EIASC, the latter moved with government backing to halt the AAUUF in 2009. Its abrogation was another great missed chance for Muslim self-organization and empowerment.

In subsequent developments, the spectre of radicalization returned again, notably in government statements. There are different views on what 'radicalization' of the Muslim community in Ethiopia means. Some in the Muslim community might encourage it as a new form of 'rights-based', self-conscious communal politics in sense of the '*Ummah*'. Others might see it as a deviant, counter-productive militant stance in a multi-religious country like Ethiopia, where religion is but one identity and where Muslim identity can be expressed in manifold forms, from Salafist to Sufist. The government view, while apprehensive in the volatile Northeast African region, seems biased by an overly 'securitized' perspective that sees all revivalist, '*Ummah*-oriented self-identification by Muslims as radicalization. This has been evident in the campaign of the past three years and found a new expression in the inconclusive trial against the 29 jailed Muslim activists, where the government prosecutor charged the defendants with conspiracy and violent activities against the constitutional order, but on doubtful evidence. Whatever the outcome of this trial, a 'war of attrition' against religious identity politics seems set to continue.

Conclusions: secularism and democracy

Article 11 in the Ethiopian Constitution – 'The state shall not interfere in religious matters and religion shall not interfere in state affairs' – has the form of a *chiasmus*, a rhetorical inversion where two or more clauses are related to each other in order to make a larger point. Good as this inverted parallelism sounds for religious freedom, the terms of the chiasmus are not of equal standing but only suggestive of a reciprocity that is not clearly defined. The Ethiopian model of managing relations between state and religion deriving from the constitutional framework thus has a few paradoxes:

- (1) The government/state is granter and sole arbiter of the secular order defined in the Constitution: i.e. the executive and not an independent constitutional court decides what is in violation of it. The government defines what 'religious matters' are and interferes on unclear grounds in 'religion' when it is deemed to take on political garb. But religious communities or institutions are not allowed to reject the state interfering when it deems fit to do so.
- (2) The secular order is defined in a number of articles in the constitution, but the specifics and limits of the expression of religious identity in the public sphere are not clear. This has given rise to ambiguity and conflict. The problem is not so much that religion should be 'banned' from the Ethiopian public domain, but rather that it cannot form the political basis or motivational framework of the pluralist polity.

As suggested above, some of the ambivalence in the constitutional framework and its articles might have been tackled with additional laws. These were repeatedly announced, but have been slow in forthcoming.⁵² Moreover, government efforts to regulate and control religious communities in Ethiopia (notably Muslims) with legal and repressive means so far mainly address the *surface level* of state-religion relations. But they provoke deeper-level responses which should rather be addressed. In cases of Muslim and Christian extremism (e.g. the *Takfir wal Hijra* terror, *Al Ittihad* and Islamic Front for the

Liberation of Oromiya (IFLO) attacks, the mosque burnings in the Jimma area, the burning down of Orthodox churches and inter-religious riots), the state acted within its brief in suppressing them, because these were issues of crime and public order. But measures to prevent religious self-organization, peaceful demonstration and claim-making or negotiation efforts by grass-roots committees provoked rebellion and an internal dynamic within the Muslim community that reinforced its political profile and growing orientation towards non-national, revivalist Islam. This is connected to the broader societal processes such as numerical growth, more urban economic prominence and shifting attitudes of the religious community itself – in so far as it is ‘united’ – towards the role of the state and the primacy of the (civil) law. Many believers now put religious identity and their religious community first and the political order second, and the processes of internal revivalism, *da’wa*, etc. have been geared to this. This has consequences not only for believers’ political attitudes towards the state and the constitutional order, but also towards the *other* religious (or secular) communities. The problem may be unsolvable. As Berhane also noted, the secular model may be the relatively best model to handle religious plurality, but will always produce challenges. More specific provisions and guidelines relating to religious freedom are needed to clarify the communities’ religious rights and duties under the secular model towards others and the wider societal order.⁵³

The 2011 ‘Ahabashism’ campaign to enhance ‘constitutional values’ and strengthen ‘politically neutral forms’ of religious identity among Muslims has backfired. It has harmed both the *AlAhabash* movement – as a legitimate form of Muslim identity, next to many others⁵⁴ – and the government’s political standing and legitimacy. It did not carry out its ‘instruction’ or information campaign on the constitution – in line with constitutional article 11(3) – with *neutral, non-religious officials*, which might have been preferable to a Muslim denomination without substantial adherence seen by many as ‘sectarian’. Moreover, well-designed *legislation* to prevent religious extremism, incendiary public discourse, discrimination, etc. according to clear criteria and backed up by a credible, professional judiciary and law enforcement has not yet been developed.

A troublesome result of the ‘Ahabashism campaign’ has been a flurry of theologically styled ‘debates’ in the form of invectives and delegitimization of the *Ahabash* movement by Ethiopian Muslim spokesmen, notably those allied to the Aweliya School. Hereby, ‘purist’ or reformist/Salafist Islam – more akin to the style of *Ahabash* leader *sheikh* Abdullah’s erstwhile opponent *sheikh* Yusuf Abdul-Rahman⁵⁵ – is elevated to a prominent role, giving rise to many preachers and imams claiming utter supremacy for their version of Islam and gaining influence. These polemics against *Ahabash* and Sufist Islam varieties deflect attention from the real issue of the current state-Muslim crisis such as: the government not giving space to internal, grass-roots processes in the Muslim community and its imposition via EIASC of a programme of ‘political education’ by *one* strand of Muslim tradition. This no doubt ignored the constitutional clause of state non-interference in religious affairs. Interestingly, the organized Muslim protest movement, due to its non-violent pressure and symbolic actions – giving ‘yellow cards’ to the government, using white ribbons – and its calling for respect of the secular state, implicitly refuted the postmodern and other critiques of ‘secularism’.

However, the multiplication of anti-*Ahabash* invectives and the discursive targeting of this movement is a precedent likely to impact negatively on religious tolerance in the country. Scapegoating *Al Ahabash* in terms of their ‘deviant’ and ‘heretical’ form of Islam can be seen as foreshadowing an attitude of hegemonism towards other groups.

Ethiopia is struggling with religious diversity as performed in the public domain and with the creeping politicization of religious identity. Religions are communal forces vis-à-vis

each other and the state, and certain religious identity expressions encroach upon others, also *within* the Christian or Muslim communities, and thereby problematize civic identity. In Ethiopia, this problem has not yet been met adequately, e.g. with an acceptance and institutionalization of neutral space in procedural national politics. As emerges from the case study above, the legal framework is not clear enough, and state law enforcement is heavy handed and opportunistic. Ethiopia made a start towards a 'secular' order – in the above sense – with constitutional article 11, but it has trouble respecting it in practice, as with many other clauses. There have been some debates and tentative directives issued on reinforcing this article so as to prepare balanced additional law-giving, but the state–religion balance is a tightrope. There is still no code of conduct on religious public (polemic) debate. No regulations on interfaith relations and religious geography, e.g. regarding rules for burial places and church and mosque building, were made, and curbing the religious noise wars have not been given priority.

The result has been that the 'freedom of religion' has allowed Muslim (and Christian) communities and their spokesmen to *avoid* facing the requirements of a secular order and *internally rethink and monitor* the challenges of 'radicalization' or exclusivist thinking that they increasingly face within.⁵⁶ One example would be that under constitutional article 27(3) the changing of one's religion (always called 'apostasy'), cannot be punishable by law, thus superseding any religious injunction to that effect. In this respect, the argument of Muslims that the state is not democratic and interferes may bounce back, because within the community the notion of what Lafont has called deliberative obligations of citizenship⁵⁷ is still underdeveloped and cannot be filled in with an appeal to religious values. The theory of the secular state says that it cannot accept religious law above constitutional law.

The deeper problem is that, despite a promising architecture, the Ethiopian political system and its central actors today seem incapable of successfully handling their own constitutional framework or democratic precepts in practice because of the overriding concern with political control and system stability. There is still no ethos of bargaining or negotiation. Reforms towards relaxing the political system, the media landscape and the judicial system to address the democratic deficit in the country would also be conducive to defuse *religious* tensions and the politicization of Islam, Christianity and religion in general. The Ethiopian secular state needs maintenance and this will be possible when coupled to democratization and reform of the repressive apparatus. Absent this, ongoing contestation and radicalization based on religious motives are likely to continue, emanating in exclusivist competition and possibly in demands for a state order based on historicist views of the nation's 'destiny' or on religious law – a recipe for communal antagonism and theocratic tendencies, and thus for regression and further closure of political space.

To conclude, it seems clear that the Muslims' struggle for civic-political rights added a new structural tension to the Ethiopian political system, and that the largely peaceful rights campaign so far has created opportunities to redefine the secular statute of the country and Muslim community rights within it. At the same time, new tensions due to the ongoing *rapprochement* of Ethiopian Muslims with the '*Ummah*' are likely. This may further their deculturalization and insertion into the rhetoric of global Muslim identity, including more 'fundamentalist' discourse, thus perpetuating the 'political problem' of religion in society. This paper has moreover shown that the secular legal order in Ethiopia is not so much deficient as incomplete, and like elsewhere in the world is subject to discursive 'negotiation' as well as subversion. It has left essential ambiguities in its definition of the relation between state/constitutional law and religious/customary law,

thus jeopardizing the supremacy of the constitution and its rhetorically declared civic, religious and democratic values.

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Notes

1. Todorov, *In Defense*, 6–7, 63–4; cp. also Habermas, “Religion.”
2. Hackett, “Regulating Religious Freedom,” 853.
3. Abbink, “Transformations of Islam,” 66–7; and Hussein, “Coexistence,” 5.
4. Abbink, “Religion in Public Spaces.”
5. See: www.onislam.net, <http://blog.ethiopianmuslims.net>, www.badrethiopia.org and www.bilaltube.com. See also LEBMA, *The Civil Rights Movement*.
6. And the lower Naiba and Qadis courts, recognized by law since 1944. The establishment of the *Shari’a* courts was reaffirmed in Proclamation 188/1999 (*Federal Negarit Gazeta* no. 10, 1999).
7. Corazza, “State and Religion,” noted: ‘There is an absurd and evident contradiction between the principle of separation [of religion and state, J.A.] and the mechanism of recognition of religious and customary courts...’ 389.
8. See also Seidel’s pertinent remarks, “State-Recognized Legal Pluralism,” 13.
9. Analytically, ‘reformist’ is a misnomer. It is a Muslim native term, suggesting a positive turn towards a ‘correct Islam’. Many Sufist Muslims would disagree.
10. In interviews in the countryside in Wollo (2004, 2006) people always mentioned Saudi funding of a new mosque or school. See also Erlich, *Saudi Arabia*; and Dereje, “The Potential.”
11. For example, see US Embassy Addis Ababa, “Countering Wahabi Influence”; and “Religious Conflict.”
12. Haustein and Østebø, “EPRDF’s Revolutionary Democracy,” 762.
13. HRCO, *120th Special Report*, 4.
14. HRCO, *117th Special Report*.
15. Cf. www.addisnegeronline.com, message of 10 March 2010 (accessed 5 April 2012).
16. ‘Muslim Students of Bahirdar University opposed the new religious directive’ (<http://ethsat.com/?s=hijab&x=0&y=0>, accessed 2 February 2013).
17. Østebø, “The Question of Becoming,” 431–2.
18. There is a Facebook group propagating the idea, under the guise of Muslim solidarity against state oppression but with wider purposes: see <https://www.facebook.com/MuslimBrothersEthiopia>, and also: <https://twitter.com/MBEthiopia>. Bawer (“The Development,” section 4.5) noted the existence of two small Muslim Brotherhood divisions in Addis Ababa, the Banaii and the Sururiya. Haustein and Østebø (“EPRDF’s Revolutionary Democracy,” 765) noted that elements of the Muslim ‘Intellectualist’ movement have propagated MB ideas, including those of Yusuf al Qaradawi, the radical Egyptian MB ideologue (For his ‘thinking’, see his speeches on YouTube).
19. “Somalia Extremists Declare Jihad on Ethiopia,” *The Daily Telegraph*, October 10, 2006.
20. “Al-Shabaab calls for revolts in Ethiopia and Kenya” (www.africareview.com/News/Al-Shabaab-calls-for-revolts-in-Ethiopia-and-Kenya/-/979180/1119058/-/vwws2d/-/index.html#sthash.3UEVSU59.dpuf).
21. Ramos, “From Beleaguered Fortresses,” 16.
22. See, e.g. Ethiopian preacher Abu Hyder on www.youtube.com/watch?v=joIcRLVxtYI. cf. Belay, *A Short Overview*.
23. That they were involved is clear: www.ethiotube.net/video/18562/Must-Watch-Federal-Affairs-Minister-Dr-Shiferaw-Tmariam-admits-Ahbash-Imported-by-Ethiopian-Government-from-Lebanon (accessed 11 March 2013). See also Ramos, “From Beleaguered Fortresses,” 23–4.
24. See also Anonymous, “It is the Right and Duty.”
25. For example, Ubah Abdusalam, “The ‘Ahbashism’ Campaign”; and Ahmedin, “Ahbash.” Also the Facebook page: www.facebook.com/AntiAhbashMuslims.Ethiopia and a website: <http://ethioantiahbhashism.com>. See also the “Action Plan to Combat the Corrupt Majlis and its

- Ahbashism Campaign,” of 8 March 2012, on www.bilaltube.com/articles/browse-AHBASH-3.html#sthash.upRcX6WJ.h9bWVgQj.dpbs (accessed 10 January 2013).
26. Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Constitutional Rights for Religion and the Rule of Law,” *A Week in the Horn*, April 27, 2012.
27. Aaron Maasho, “Ethiopian Muslims Protest Government ‘Interference,’” *Reuters News*, May 11, 2012.
28. See: www.ethiotube.net/video/19552/Breaking-News-Ethiopian-governments-warns-Muslims-gathering-at-Awolia-School-against-Ahbash-Mejlis (3 May 2012, accessed 2 February 2012).
29. Human Rights Watch, “Ethiopia: Prominent Muslims Detained in Crackdown,” August 15, 2012 (www.hrw.org/news/2012/08/15/ethiopia-prominent-muslims-detained-crackdown).
30. “Ethiopian Muslim Election Turns Violent,” October 23, 2012 (online at: www.theafricareport.com/20121023501820528/society-and-culture/ethiopian-muslim-election-turns-violent.html, accessed 28 October 2012).
31. W. Davison, “Ethiopia airs Jihadi Film Amid Sensitive Muslim Protest Trial,” *Christian Science Monitor*, February 14, 2013.
32. US Embassy Addis Ababa, “Religious Conflict.”
33. “Ethiopian Regime War on Ancient Ethiopian Monasteries,” *Press Release Ethiopian Heritage Society of North America*, March 24, 2012 (<http://ehsna.org/?p=1032>). See also the expression of support by *Haji Mohamed Seid’s* (diaspora-based Ethiopian Muslim leader) for the Waldubba monastery, at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNdybGlpseM (accessed 10 February 2013).
34. The wider context of the government’s policies is that of Islamist terror threats in the region: the Somali *Al-Shabaab* and its jihadist propaganda, the past violent attacks of *Al Ittihad al Islami*, the *Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia* (1990s) and the small *Takfir wal Hijra* groups (‘Khawarijj’).
35. Probably resulting from Edward Said’s deeply flawed and tendentious study *Orientalism* (1978).
36. At: <http://sodere.com/video/ethiopia-full-jehadawi-harakat-etv-documentary> (accessed 20 February 2013).
37. In January 2014, the latest ETV film on “Terrorism in Ethiopia” (part 4) was screened (www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0nbSI3wkj8; accessed 27 January 2014).
38. But see Dereje, “The Potential.”
39. See, e.g. www.youtube.com/watch?v=JwKtoBDDwTQ.
40. See Østebø, *Localizing Salafism*; Desplat, “Heilige Stadt”; Dereje, “The Transnational Politics”; also Desplat and Østebø, “Muslims in Ethiopia.”
41. Sayyid Qutb, for instance, ‘denounced the idea of the secular state as a kind of blasphemy, an attempt to usurp the will of God by passing laws that have a merely human authority’ (Scruton, “Democracy”).
42. Already evident in Hussein Ahmed’s work, describing several radical-Muslims in nineteenth-century Wollo with bonds to Sufist Islam: Hussein, *Islam*, 177, 179 “Al-Hajj Bushra,” 178–9, 185.
43. A serious example is the radical Egyptian preacher featuring at a 2012 meeting of Muslims in the Ethiopian-American diaspora, ‘advising’ the Ethiopian Muslims on future strategy. See: www.youtube.com/watch?v=_k_cE74gn9A&feature=share (accessed 20 February 2013).
44. Pew Forum of Religion and Public Life, *Tolerance and Tension*, 3, 26 and 27 for figures on adherence and commitment to religion in Africa.
45. See: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqyWLjtN_cc; www.youtube.com/watch?v=QhdeqMbJ4AI; and www.ethiotube.net/video/18010/Ethiopian-Muslims-Spring-Denouncing-Ahbash-and-Majlis-at-the-Awolia-College-2-of-2 (accessed 30 February 2013). See also Anonymous, *Addis Ababa*, 2011 p.18 line 855.
46. Interview with a former secretary of the Muslim Council, Addis Ababa, 20 October 2006; and interview with Muslim youngsters near Anwar Mosque, Addis Ababa, 18 November 2012.
47. See Pew Forum of Religion and Public Life, “Tolerance and Tension,” 11.
48. Erlich, *Saudi Arabia*, 189, 200, 209, and my numerous interviews in Wollo and Addis Ababa, 2004, 2006, 2011.
49. See the pertinent comment by Omer Shifaw, “Pebbles for Grains: A Story of Betrayal,” November 27, 2012 (www.awrambatimes.com/?p=4772, accessed 8 December 2012).
50. Dereje, “The Transnational Politics,” 1903–04.

51. Ibid., 1908.
52. There is only a 2008 'Directive on Secularism in Educational Institutions', issued by the Ministry of Education, based on constitutional article 90(2), and an unofficial warning given by the Government in late 2011, prohibiting insulting or defamatory religious polemics, in line with constitutional article 27(5). This led to a decline in polemical publications and video compact discs (VCDs) on sale in Ethiopia. See also: "Ethiopia to write a new law on public display of religion" (www.ezega.com/news/NewsDetails.aspx?Page=news&NewsID=3388, accessed 11 March 2013). The 2008 directive met with blanket *refusal* by several Muslim Councils: see "Draft regulation is unacceptable" - Addis Ababa Ulema Council and East Hararghe Majlis', 8 February 2008, on: <http://blog.ethiopianmuslims.net/?p=220> (accessed 4 January 2013).
53. Berhane, "The Scope of Religious Freedom," 188–9.
54. Despite theological objections made to it by Salafists and other Muslims (e.g. Ahmedin, "Ahbash"; "Ahbash and Sufiyya," 8 March 2012, on www.bilaltube.com/articles/read-ahbash-sufiyya_117.html#sthash.YSo3OV9b.dpbs; "Exposing Abd Allah al-Harari and his sect the Ahbash of Lebanon," on: <http://sectarianrefutations.blogspot.nl/2011/12/exposing-abd-allah-al-harari-and-his.html>; and in a puzzling text, "Some info about Ahbash," on: <http://notoahbashinethiopia.wordpress.com/2011/09/20/some-info-about-ahbash>). Their arguments are quite contested.
55. See Kabha and Erlich, "Al-Ahbash," 522; and Desplat, "Heilige Stadt," 210–15.
56. As Jawar noted: 'Granted religious moderation is a vital state interest, such moderation ought to be engineered from within rather than being imposed externally'. Jawar Mohammed, "Muslim Activism and the Ethiopian State: Accommodation or Repression?" (24 March 2012) at: <http://nazret.com/blog/index.php/2012/03/24/growing-muslim-activism-and-the-ethiopian-state-accommodation-or-repression?blog=15> (accessed 10 December 2012). Jawar's credibility was, however, seriously dented by the row over his perceived extremist views in a 2013 speech; see: www.youtube.com/watch?v=RMLLMAMWdG8.
57. Cf. Lafont's excellent "Religion and the Public Sphere."

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